Reader- response to *Dear Mr. Henshaw*

As a young girl I remember having a diary and writing in it almost every day. Whether it was about a girl who I disliked or a crush I had and what we talked about if we ever did get to talk on that day. I do feel like this is a book that a young reader can identify with; preferably elementary school kids grades 3-5th. Unfortunately, too many kids deal with their parents’ divorce and living with a single parent who is just barely trying to make ends meet. Also, with divorces many children do feel like it is their fault and it was important that his feelings were expressed so other kids who read don’t feel so alone with their emotions. The passage that had the greatest effect on me was the Sunday, February 4th entry when he writes *I hate my father.* My heart actually broke for Leigh and his situation. Fortunately throughout my whole life I always had my dad and mom there for me but I can only imagine what he was feeling when he heard another boy say “Bill are we going for pizza”? and also to know that the fact the he picked up the phone and was not on the road meant his dad had no intension on calling him was even more heartbreaking. I think in a way this diary was like therapy to Leigh and that’s why so many teachers encourage journals in the classroom or at home.

As the reader I too felt hatred towards Bill the father. Why would he make his son go through this? Why would he have time to take another boy who wasn’t his son for pizza but couldn’t phone his own son? This is also a real world situation for most kids who live with their single moms. Either the dad has another life and is too busy or they just don’t care. We can see that Leigh at one point actually had great admiration for his father and love all he wanted was to be with his father and have him come around. When Mr. Henshaw asked Leigh what he wished for Leigh said “I wish someday dad and Bandit would pull up in front in the rig” (p. 29). Although Leigh has been let down by his father he still hopes and wishes that one day things would get back to how they were and his father would care a little more. He even says that just a simple ride to school in his father’s truck would make him happy. Simplicity is what truly makes a kid happy. Yes a nice down jacket is nice but what he longs for is that father-son relationship.

Throughout the whole story I feel like Leigh wasn’t expressing himself fully in his diary and for the first time he let it all out saying how terrible he felt especially after hearing another little boy on the other line asking if Bill was going to take him for pizza. At this moment I really felt what he was feeling. This was his longest entry. I feel like Leigh was even scared to write down his feelings even though he was the only one that was going to see the diary because this was his reality and he was really upset by it. There are things that are better written down than actually said and that’s why Leigh was able to release more in his diary. Many kids struggle because their feelings are bottled up and they can’t find a way to let it out. To show that Leigh was feeling actual hatred towards his father was good so that readers like him who are going through the same thing can know that hatred is a common feeling in that situation.

In the book “Pleasures” in chapter 3 there’s a part that talks about if pleasure can be taught. I think all teachers strive to have all their students enjoy literature but like this section says in order for students to enjoy readings that are more difficult it is important to teach techniques that will make readings enjoyable. This is an enjoyable book because it’s something so many people can identify with. Whether it’s a child who lives with a single parent or a little boy who has hatred towards his father for not taking time out for him. However, there are other works of literature that are equally as important but may not be as pleasurable. As an educator that I want to become one day I hope to engage my students into all kinds of literature as long as it is good for them.